

VEDANTA

THE BASIC CULTURE OF INDIA

by

C. RAJAGOPALACHARI

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES,
NEW DELHI

First Edition, September 1946
Second Edition, April 1949

Paper cover: One Rupee
Cloth bound: Two Rupees

CONTENTS

	Page
Vedanta and the New Order	1
The Source of Vedanta	7
The First Step	10
The Good Life	12
Evolution	15
Maya	18
One Life in All	20
Salvation	23
The Ethics of Vedanta	27
The Law of Karma	30
The Life of the Vedantin	36
Conclusion	42
TEXTS	45

Chapter I

VEDANTA AND THE NEW ORDER

Truth being one and indivisible, the prevailing contradictions in science, religion and politics are bound to be harmful to social well-being. Disharmony in fundamentals leads to doubt, pain, hypocrisy and frustration. We cannot afford the waste of human effort that is involved in this. The laws of nature that we know, the philosophy we believe in, the state-craft that we practise, should all be made to accord and harmonise with one another. If we have real belief in truth and something of the courage and adventure of the earlier builders of human civilization, we need not despair of achieving this.

What is taught as science and implicitly accepted as truth is expected to be forgotten or put aside in religion. Again, the faith that is insisted on as sacred and inviolable in religion is expected to be pigeon-holed when practising state-craft and not allowed to play any part. In order to bring this about we resort to various forms of self-deception, and practise fraud on our children with the deliberate object of keeping the disharmony going

through generations. A simultaneous acceptance of contradictory ideas, even if *bona fide*, cannot be a healthy process. The wages of untruth is spiritual death. The chief stock-in-trade of progress, the minds and the intellects of men and women, is subjected to continual damage. How can this be good for mankind as a whole, or for the individual?

In the olden days there was not so much contradiction. The backwardness of science was a factor that reduced the contradiction. Fervent adherence to religion and philosophy, not only did not cause disharmony but on the contrary led men to great achievement. This was possible because they did not try to believe in contrary things. Science has now grown and has been accepted on a much wider scale than ever before. As a result the maladjustment is at present more serious.

As for the contradictions between religion and political activities, the divergence is even greater than between science and religion. It is a miracle that honest professing Christians preserve their sanity under the conditions of current national and international activities. The State permits, aids and abets the total infringement of what is read and taught as the word of Christ. The reign of relentless com-

petition, the right to make maximum private profit at the expense of others, and the exploitation of advantages gained so that differences between man and man may grow in geometric progression, are all denials of Christ, and yet for the execution of such unchristian plans, institutions equal in respectability to cathedrals and churches are established under the authority or protection of the State. Civilization must crumble under the weight of this hypocrisy. The dissent of certain individuals who express their opinions without materially interfering with the existing order, far from being as at first it may appear a relieving feature, is mere escapism if not a variety of abetment of the crime.

It is obvious that any religion or philosophy contrary to modern science is bound to be sham and hypocrisy. If we desire to secure a firm basis for human progress, all *maladjustments either between science and religion or between religion and state craft* must be rectified so that integrated thought and feeling may be established. In India there is a religious philosophy as old as civilization itself which, strange as the claim may seem to outsiders, is remarkably consistent with science. Out of that religious philosophy has been evolved a

code of ethics which can be a firm spiritual basis for a juster social and economic organisation. It is remarkable that the evolutionary hypothesis and the rule of law as the men of science know it, were anticipated in Hinduism. The God of Vedanta is not an anthropomorphic creation of human fancy. Divine sovereignty is explained in the Gita in language which anticipates and meets the difficulties that modern science raises against religious cosmology. The sovereignty of God is exercised in and through the unchangeable law of cause and effect, through the laws of nature in all spheres.

All things abide in Me, yet behold the wonder, I stand apart and Nature works by herself. Prakriti brings forth the moving and unmoving without my interference.”*

A study of the Upanishads will show that Vedanta has anticipated science by postulating that the universe has developed by a gradual unfolding of the power lodged within the primordial substance. In fact the philosophy of Hinduism is nearer to the evolutionary and atomic theories of natural science and physics than the doctrines of any other religion. The dominant characteristic of the Upanishads is what distinguishes scientific research, insist-

* C. its IX 4 10

ence on adherence to truth and tireless investigation.

Planned co-operative economy, in place of profit-motive and the so-called civil liberty of private competition, cannot safely depend on mere external authority however powerful. We must have a culture and a generally accepted code of spiritual values which work as a law from within. Without such spiritual control, mere material planning must needs culminate in *widespread corruption and fraud*. Vedanta and the ethic which follows from it and which is expanded and fully set out in the Bhagavad-Gita, are pre-eminently fitted to serve as the spiritual basis for planned co-operative community-life, wherein every one must work according to capacity and gets according to need.

Work without aiming at personal profit and with an eye only to the welfare of the community is the way of life taught in the Bhagavad-Gita. It lays emphasis on the equal dignity and sacredness of all labour that falls to one's lot, and on honest effort with detachment and without agitation over results. Indeed the Gita lays down in a unique manner the socialist doctrine in terms of religion. The performance of one's allotted task, says the

Gita, is nothing less than worship of God in the truest sense *

We want a wise allotment of work to individuals as well as groups in accordance with the demands of the general interest in place of laissez-faire and the divine right to make private profit. If we want society to control individual life so as to produce this result, we cannot depend only on the spy and the policeman watching over citizens. We must build up a spiritual life which makes joy out of discharge of duty and acts as a law from within, making the execution of State-imposed laws easy. In Vedanta we have a teaching rooted in immemorial tradition in India which can serve as the spiritual and cultural basis for a new and juster economy of life.

What is Vedanta and what is the Vedantic way of life? In the following pages will be found an attempt to explain this in as brief and simple terms as possible, from which the reader can see for himself whether the claim made herein is justified.

* Gita XVIII 45-49

Chapter II

THE SOURCE OF VEDANTA

"Let the whole world rise against me. Let calumny and ridicule be poured on me. Let me lose all my precious possessions and be driven to beg for livelihood. Let my very friends turn against me and put poison in my food. Let men attack me arrayed in numbers and armed with deadly weapons. Let the very heavens break and fall on my head. There is no fear in my heart, none." Thus sang Bharati, the Tamil poet, referring to the fearlessness that emerges out of Vedanta. Vedanta is the tap-root of Indian culture in the past as well as now. Whatever courage, heroism, self-sacrifice or greatness was shown by men and women in India, was all derived from Vedanta, the philosophy of the Vedas. Even now Vedanta is the living spirit and genius of the people of India. However much foreign civilization or new aspirations may affect us, the main source has not decayed. The lives of the rich and the poor, of the leisured classes and the peasants and labourers, of Hindus, Mussalmans and Christians, of the illiterate and the learned, of the honest and the dishonest, are sweetened alike

by the pervasive fragrance of Indian philosophy Vedanta is the basic culture of India

The Upanishads are the source of Vedanta When we study ancient books we should not expect them to be like books written yesterday When they were written the world, this country and the lives and habits of men were all very different from what they are today We may not forget this great difference and interpret and judge books written several thousands of years ago in the light of modern controversies Books written in those days must deal with matters in relation to the life of those days We should exercise our imagination and intelligence to re create the old life and read the books of Indian *rishis* on that background, although printed now on modern paper in modern type

The principal teaching of the Upanishads is this Man cannot achieve permanent happiness through physical enjoyment, through wealth or the goods of the world, or even by elevation to happier realms above through the performance of sacrifices prescribed by the Vedas—the potency of which was a matter of implicit belief in those times Happiness can result only from liberation, and only spiritual enlightenment can liberate us,

breaking the bond of *Karma* and uniting us with the Ultimate Being.

The path of enlightenment runs through stages. The *mantras* of the Upanishads may appear to contradict one another in some places. But if it is remembered that the truth is taught by degrees, the contradictions disappear. When the Upanishads were composed, there was no education except through oral instruction received by the disciple living in intimate companionship with the teacher. There was no such thing as reading a book taken out of a library or bought at a book-shop.

In Vedanta, there are no separate cults based on the worship of Siva or of Vishnu. Controversies over who is the greater god or by which name the Supreme Being should be adored do not find a place in it. In his treatises on Vedanta, Sankaracharya uses the word 'Narayana' to indicate the Supreme Being. In the Saiva-siddhanta books, the final Reality is called 'Siva.' Names, mental conceptions of the Deity for purposes of contemplation, the images of worship, even the sound 'Om' are mere means to turn our hearts towards the Supreme. Vedanta is the common heritage of all of us in India in whatever denomination we may have been brought up.

Chapter III

THE FIRST STEP

It is not the teaching of Vedanta that we should renounce the world. It is a mistake to identify Vedanta with retirement from life and social activities. Vedanta calls for renunciation of attachment, desires and passions, but not of daily duties in co-operative life.* Vedanta gives us the soul-force that will enable us to root out selfishness, egotism, attachment to pleasure and the horror of pain, and to dedicate our lives to the efficient performance of our duties. Out of Vedanta we can develop resolution and fearlessness in the effort to lead a life of truth.

The first step in Vedanta is to reach the firm conviction that 'I' am entirely different from 'my body'. Is there any distinct thing that may be called 'Soul' within the body? Is it a thing altogether apart from the physical body, or is it merely a functioning of the body, which we wrongly regard as a separate entity? When the body dies, does the soul also pass away with it or does it continue to have a

* Gita III 20 29

Chapter V

EVOLUTION

The sixth chapter of the Chhandogya Upanishad begins with the old, old riddle "Was there a First Cause?" Shall we, seeing that the search for causes takes us backwards along an interminable chain of causes, give up the theory of causation and say that the world came out of nothing?

This cannot be, says the *Rishi*. Out of nothing, nothing can come. Non-being cannot produce Being. In the cause-less beginning therefore, we must hold that there was a first cause. *Sat*, i.e., Being with consciousness. And *Sat* willed to expand and multiply and became light, water and all the living forms in the world, serving as food for one another and growing and multiplying. It is the *Sat* that is still multiplying and expanding.

"How can this vast universe with its multitudinous variety be produced in this simple way?" asked Svetaketu, whom his father Uddalaka was instructing.

"Fetch a fruit of that *nyagrodha* tree," said Uddalaka. "Here is one, sir," said

Svetaketu "Break it, what do you see therein?" "I see some little seeds," said Svetaketu 'Crush one of the tiny seeds,' said the father "Yes, I have done it, sir" "What do you see therein?" "Nothing," said Svetaketu

"Yet in that subtle substance inside that tiny seed, which is hardly visible to the eye, existed all this big-branching *nyagrodha* tree Do you wonder at it? Likewise all that exists in this universe was in the Sat, and dear boy, thou too art That Contemplate on it"

In the Mundaka Upanishad* the Rishi says

'The whole Universe is an unfoldment of the primordial Being The sun, the moon and all the quarters of the world, all knowledge and the souls of all the existing beings are parts and manifestations of that single all-immanent Being All life, all qualities, functions and activities are forms of that single Energy It lighted up the sun and therefore does the sun burn like a faggot and give warmth and light to us The rain does not rain but it is the primordial Cause that rains through and by means of the clouds Beings come together and multiply, but it is the First Cause that through them still multiplies The

* II 4, 5 9, 10

mountains and the seas, the rivers, and the trees and herbs and their life-bearing essences, all have issued out of that Immanent Spirit that dwells in all things and in all our hearts. Know it, my dear boy, and cut asunder the knots of ignorance that bind."

Chapter VI

MAYA

We have heard it said by Vedantins that this world is an illusion. This does not mean that the world is not real. The world is real. All the teachers who taught about Maya and God have lived their lives on the basis that this world is a reality. Leaving aside the weak and the hypocritical who teach one thing and practise another, if we reflect on the actual lives of the good and great Vedantins who lived in the light of truth it will be evident that they took this world and this life and the law of Karma to be hard realities. If still they taught the doctrine that all is *Maya*, that everything is an illusion created by the Lord what does the teaching mean?

When it is said that the Lord is all, it means that He is the indwelling spirit that makes all life live. As the soul is to the body, so is the Lord the soul of all souls. When one says 'I went', 'I came', 'I did', though outwardly the act of the body, it is really the act of the person that dwells within and brings about all the activity. It would be a mistake to believe

that the body is the agent. In the same way, the Supreme Being is the soul of our souls. Every movement of the individual soul is an activity of the Lord. All souls are so to say His bodies. The Lord is a reality and so are the souls that are permeated by Him. The body is a reality although it is the spirit within that gives to the body its life. Going one step further, that which gives life and reality to the individual souls and makes them what they are is the Supreme Being. The *Paramatman* permeates and supports all souls, but that does not mean that the latter are unreal. The universe as a whole and every individual living and non-living thing severally serve as bodies for the All-pervading Universal Being.

The doctrine of *Maya* does not mean that everything is unreal and that we are free to act as we please. Life is real and life is subject to eternal and unchangeable law. This and not Unreality is the true implication of the Vedantic doctrine.

Chapter VII

ONE LIFE IN ALL

So, then, within the body, the soul which fills it with life and within the soul, the Supreme Soul which fills the individual soul and gives it its being, this according to Vedanta is the structure of life. Just as the soul gives to the body the capacity to function as a person, so does the Supreme Being give to the soul its capacity to function as an individual soul.

The same soul takes many bodies in various births. When it does so, it has no memory of its past or knowledge of its own true nature. The soul identifies itself completely with the body which it bears for the time being. In like manner all souls which form at one and the same time the body of the Supreme Soul do not realise it but carry on as if separate from one another. Though the *antaratman*, the indweller, is one and the same, each soul lives a life of separate individuality, with no sense of identity with others. This is what is called *Maya*. In the learned and the illiterate, in the hero and the coward, in the strong and the weak, in the mighty and the lowly, in all the multitudes of living beings, it is the Supreme

Soul that, abiding in every one of them, makes them what they are

The indwelling Spirit is hidden from our perception by our desires and distractions, by our pleasures and pains. The *atman* becomes altogether inaccessible to our intelligence. The spirit suffers no taint though lying hidden in the midst of a heap of impurities. If the mind be concentrated, the senses controlled and the heart drawn away from external objects, the turbid consciousness gets clear and then we begin to see the soul as something real and distinct from the body within which it is lodged. We shall see, besides the Divine Spirit that dwells within that soul. When it is fully realised that it is the Supreme Soul that lives and acts within all, pleasures and pains vanish.

Sunlight has no shape. It shines equally in all directions. But shadows have shapes. It is the obstruction to light that becomes the shadow. If there is no limitation or obstruction, light spreads and shines evenly. The individual souls are the shadows that are caused in the path of the infinite light of the Supreme Being. As soon as the obstruction is removed, the shadow merges in the light. Karma causes the shadow, i.e., the separate

births and lives The Supreme Being is the light The shadow takes shape as the individual soul

This way of looking at it should not lead one to think that Vedanta is a doctrine of illusion and unreality The shadow that is caused by the light of the sun is not an unreality The shadow is as true as the light although it is a fact that it is the light that makes the changing shadow

Chapter VIII

SALVATION

Moksha or deliverance is the soul's realisation of the Supreme Being. *Moksha* is not arrival in another world or place. When the *mind is enlightened by the knowledge that the soul and the in-dwelling Supreme Soul are one, the shadow merges in the light. This is liberation. It is the loss of all feeling of distinction and the recognition that everything around us is the body of the Supreme Soul. The word Moksha in Sanskrit means simply Release. Moksha is a state of being. It is not a place, palace, garden or world. Therefore-* sang the Tamil saint

“When purified having travelled
on the road to Truth,
With the senses well-withdrawn, and
the mind
Rapt in meditation of the boundless
One,
All pleasure and pain[’] wither away
And attachment dies,
Then and there is Heaven
And the joy that is Heaven

Attaining enlightenment
 Abandoning all attachments,
 If one stands serene without any
 concern,
 It is liberation. It is Bliss
 Not knowing this, they ask in
 ignorance
 Where is Heaven? Where is Heaven?
 What is the nature of Bliss?
 And lose themselves in endless
 confusion"

Differences in method of exposition arise
 when explaining the mutual relation of body,
 soul and the Supreme Being. The third Entity,
 the *Paramatman*, eludes our grasp and so our
 great teachers have adopted various methods
 of elucidation. Below are a few examples

It is the soul that gives the body its quality
 as a living body. It is the Supreme Being
 that endows the individual soul with its quality
 as a divine spark. The soul upholds the life
 in the body. The Supreme Soul upholds the
 divine nature of the soul. Just as in this
 mortal life, body and soul can exist as one in
 happy combination, so also if the individual
 souls live in happy unity with the Supreme
 Soul and without any imperfection, ignorance
 -or distraction, it is *Moksha*. In order to attain

this unity with the Supreme Soul, purity of life and self-control are needed.

We may look at it in another way. The individual soul is only the shadow of the Supreme Universal Soul. Ignorance is the cause of the shadow and of the impression that the shadow is different from the thing which produces it. This feeling of separation grows more and more through desire, attachment, anger and hatred. When the mind awakens, the two merge into one.

The sun shines on the water. When the surface of the water breaks into ripples we see numerous little suns on the water. The individual souls are like the reflections of the sun in water. If there be no water there will be no reflections. In the same way, the individual souls become one with the Supreme on the removal of ignorance. To dispel ignorance and to obtain knowledge, we need purity, self-control, devotion and discrimination.

Just as all the five senses merge in the soul and disappear when we sleep at night, so also the enlightened soul is united and absorbed in the Supreme Soul.

These and several other forms of elucidation are adopted by the various Vedantic

schools of thought, viz., the Dwaita (dualist), Advaita (monist) and Visishtadvaita (qualified monist) philosophers. Though the methods of elucidation and teaching may differ, the Vedantic life which is the way of liberation recommended by all of them is just the same. All schools of Vedanta lead to the same ethic, and this binds all Vedantins in one outlook.

Chapter IX

THE ETHICS OF VEDANTA

When we come to understand the relation between the individual *atman* and the Supreme Soul, the feeling of separation between one living being and another melts away. To attain freedom from the sense of separation is not a process of knowledge, a gathering of information, but a change of state, something like waking from sleep. A man has a dream. He is distressed by what he sees in the dream. How can he escape from this distress? Relief can come only through waking from sleep and realizing that he was dreaming. Similarly, we should wake up from the separation that deludes the soul and liberate ourselves from our sorrows. Therefore do the Upanishads proclaim "Arise! Awake! Arise!"

The realization that the Supreme Soul is within us is therefore a change of state like waking from sleep. It is not like learning from another who has seen that someone is in the next room, a mere piece of knowledge obtained by enquiry.

It is easy to wake up from sleep. But it is not easy to wake up from the great sleep of

worldly life Our mental disposition must change entirely. First of all the desire to wake up must surge in the heart. Secondly, unremitting vigilance must be exercised like that of a performer on the tight-rope who cannot, once having secured his balance, go to sleep on it. The external and internal sense must be controlled, right conduct must be maintained until it becomes a matter of course, and the inner being must be kept in a pure and untarnished condition. Perpetual vigilance over one's mind is necessary to escape slipping back into the world of distinctions.

Impelled by ignorance, we seek temporary pleasures and do many things to obtain them. If we do not find the pleasures we seek or if we get them for a time and lose them, we produce in ourselves anger, hatred and grief. This intensifies our original ignorance. Egoism, the feeling of "I", the possessive feelings of 'mine', the acquisitive urge of 'for me' and the passions that arise out of this steadily grow in intensity. We are thus thrown farther and farther away from the truth. Desisting from this course and positively and definitely striving to get nearer and nearer to the truth is the path of liberation. Purity and humility are essential. We should cultivate the conviction of mind that the Sup-

reme Soul is within us and all around us and earnestly bend our minds to contemplation of the oneness of all life. It is about this oneness of the Universal that Bharati, the national poet of the South, sang:

“The crow and the sparrow are
my kin,
The wide seas and the hills are
my community.
Whatever I see, wherever
my vision turns,
It is my own flesh and blood,
myself!
Oh, this boundless ecstasy!”

Though the perfect light is not attained, effort should not be relaxed. Even if the truth is partially realised, it will do us great good. The very effort will largely purge us of our faults and help us towards right conduct and to escape from many sinful deeds. The mental effort to realize the universal identity will itself raise us to a higher plane.

Chapter X

THE LAW OF KARMA

The body is a tool, a fine tool, a magic tool with which its master, the soul, strangely becomes one and inseparable. In the same way, the soul too is a tool for God who resides within the soul and uses it for what purpose or why we cannot unravel or say. It is a mystic relationship in which the tool and he who wields it are merged in inextricable fashion. The body and the subtle senses within it should not be disloyal to their master, the soul, but serve as good tools. Even so, the individual should be a good and loyal tool for the Lord who dwells within and should dedicate every act, thought and word to Him.

Acts are done through body, speech and mind. Every act has its appointed effect. The law of cause and effect is unalterable. The effect lies inherent in the cause, like the tree in its seed. Water dries up when exposed to the sun. This cannot be altered. When the heat and the water meet, the effect is there. This is the case with everything. The cause holds the effect in its womb. If we reflect

deeply, the entire world in all aspects will be found to revolve in accordance with unalterable laws. This is the doctrine of *Karma* taught in the Vedanta. It is wrong to think of *Karma* in terms of fatalism. Destiny as taught in Vedanta does not involve a surrender of effort or a breakdown of faith in natural laws. *Karma* is the unalterable law of effect following previous causes. This is what distinguishes Vedanta from fatalism as it emerged in the West from the pagan philosophies.

When a Hindu speaks of the decree of fate, it means that one should expect only the fruit of one's action. No act can ever go for nothing, failing to produce its result. Again an act can produce only its true result. Nothing else can happen. It is not possible to do a thing and escape its result, or expect something, to produce which something else should have been done. Given the necessary acts, the appropriate results must follow. The law of *Karma* thus constitutes true freedom of action.

With mind, speech and body we perform acts. The thoughts which we think, the words spoken and acts done; all produce their fruits. The consequence cannot be escaped.

When a Vedantin says that everything happens according to *Karma*, it does not mean

that knowledge and human effort are vain and that human activity does not count "Yes, I agree it is decreed. It is the decree of law that there is no happiness for the ignorant. It is the decree of law that if the laws of health are neglected, diseases must be endured," said Bharati, explaining how the law of *Karma* is not fatalism. Industry and character will have their reward, and the law of *Karma* is the charter that guarantees this.

When we do not know the causes which produced an event but which all the same assuredly exist, we call the result Destiny, decree of Fate, or chance. But this nomenclature means nothing but the lamenting of results and the confession of a failure to use our intelligence to find out the causes. The Sanskrit word *Adrishta* commonly used as an equivalent for Fate means literally 'that which was not seen'. That is really all about it. It does not mean that it is not subject to law, it is only what was not previously seen.

We can see without the help of any doctrine that every thought or act, good or bad, has at once an effect on oneself, apart from its effect on others or on the outside world. Every motion of the mind deals a stroke with chisel and mallet, whether one wants it or not, on

one's own character and its evolution is made better or worse thereby. If I think evil today, I think it more readily and persistently tomorrow, and likewise is it with good thoughts. If I control or calm myself, it becomes more spontaneous, more easy next time and this goes on progressively.

At death, the Hindu doctrine says, whatever character has been hammered out by the thoughts, deeds and repentances of the life that is closed continues to attach itself as the initial start of character for the soul in its next journey. As a result of our actions and thoughts and consequent attachments in former births, we come into being in this birth with certain natural tendencies. It is the belief in past and future lives and in the continuity of evolution through many lives that causes the confusion about *Karma*.

No explanation or theory in regard to the ultimate cause of things can be free from objections or difficulties from the rationalist point of view. But on the assumption of an immortal soul as the basis of personality, no theory can be formulated more in conformity with known laws of nature than the Hindu doctrine of *Karma*. Man evolves himself exactly according to his actions the process being

unbroken by death and passing on to the next life. This, the most important doctrine in Hindu religion, is the application in the moral sphere of the law of conservation of energy. Indeed, both may be looked upon as parts of one law. Karma is the law of conservation in the spiritual world. Cause and effect must be equivalent. As death is only disintegration of the body and not of the soul, the law of cause and effect, so far as the soul is concerned, continues to operate beyond death. The death of the body does not operate as a bankruptcy-discharge. The old account is carried over.

The tiniest pebble thrown into water produces a ripple. The disturbance is carried onwards in ever-widening circles on the water. Likewise also do all our acts and thoughts produce results. The most transient and secret thought entertained in the mind ruffles the Universal Calm and the disturbance has to be worked off.

Whether a man frees himself from the fruits of his past deeds that hold him in their grip from birth, or adds some more links to the chain that binds him depends upon the way he lives. But the soul has the freedom and the power to overcome natural tendencies and to strive for liberation.

"Victory is certain, O mind!
Away with false fear.
Devotion will bear its certain fruit.
Shoulders we have,
Broad and strong for any work,
Intelligence to produce,
And gather what we rightly desire.
Unalterable law prevails.
Away then with all fear!"

In words that can thus be rendered feebly in English, the modern Tamil poet has sung the creed of freedom that is postulated in Vedanta. Freedom is secured, not taken away, by unchangeable law.

Chapter XI

THE LIFE OF THE VEDANTIN

The Gita expands and explains the ethics of Vedanta. It emphasizes that the activities of the world must go on. We should so act that thereby the world must improve in the coming generations. Like good people who plant trees for their children and children's children, we should work to improve humanity by improving ourselves for future births even though there may be no continuity of memory and identity of personality. Otherwise, the world cannot become better and better, as we should all strive to make it. The good man should do the tasks to which he is called and which appertain to his place in society. In all his activities he does things like others, outwardly, but inwardly he maintains a spirit of detachment. He does everything without selfish motive. He maintains equilibrium of mind in success and failure, in pleasure and pain in joy and sorrow. Purified thus, the good man is qualified for further progress by meditation and prayer. Yoga consists in thus living a dedicated life in the midst of worldly affairs. Work should be done

in a spirit of duty done, and results should not be permitted to agitate the mind. This unselfish and detached attitude can and should be cultivated even while we are busily engaged in life's activities. Continual practice of this attitude is the essence of the Vedantic life.

Isavasya Upanishad begins thus

'Everything in the Universe abides in the Supreme Being. Realizing this, dedicate everything you do to that Being. Cast off the desires that arise in the heart, the thought of possessing what is enjoyed by another. Joy comes by such renunciation of desire. Do your duties and go through the allotted span of life. In detachment and dedication lies the way for man to keep his soul uncontaminated, not otherwise.'

The teaching of the Gita may be summarised as follows

The Vedantin always bears in mind that within him and in every object in the world dwells the Supreme Soul. He will not give room in his mind to feelings of lust or anger or desire.

He performs fully, carefully and conscientiously but without attachment, all duties devolving upon him as a result of birth or of

events and circumstances, or arising out of the place he occupies in society. There is in truth no superiority or inferiority in the various duties allotted to individuals or groups in any social order, all being equally necessary of performance for the maintenance and welfare of society. They should all be performed in the spirit of unselfish co-operation, which ennobles and equalizes all tasks.

Controlling his senses, he leads a pure life, regulating his work, food, rest, recreation and sleep.

He does not lose heart in the face of difficulties, and whether sorrow or happiness falls to his lot, he maintains his courage and equanimity.

Let no one be dazed by the thought that this schedule of conduct is of no use to ordinary men who are not saints or sages.

‘Even a little effort in this direction will yield good fruit. There is no waste in this. It is not like the rule of medicine which says that if one fails in following the prescribed diet, the medicine may not only do no good but may do harm. There is no danger arising out of defects and imperfections. Even if this teaching is practised to a small extent, it will do great good.’*

* Gita II 40

The question may be asked, how can it produce any enthusiasm to be told that 'something will be fruitful in a future birth'? We shall be born in the next birth without any memories of the past. We do not now remember anything of our past lives, nor will the memories of this life follow us in the next birth. Therefore, what does it matter whether we do good or evil? Let us seek the pleasures of the present moment. If I am born again, I shall then be a different man remembering nothing of the present. What is the relation between him and me? How can we be one without continuity of memories? Why should I labour for him? With death the memories of this life end. Thus may the seeker of pleasure object to the teaching of Vedanta about right conduct and self control for the sake of a future birth.

But there is a hunger in the soul that self-seeking and momentary pleasures cannot satisfy. The joy of right conduct is inherent in human nature. This stands confirmed by the inner feeling of every one of us, and by experience as well as all history, recorded and unrecorded. Members of a family work for the good of the family and of the village. We see ordinary men suffering privations for the sake of others whom they have never seen, merely

because they belong to their place. People do not sit with folded hands indifferent to the good of their village or town. We see that men sacrifice their self interest and suffer for the good of the State and for the safety of their country. We do not know who will enjoy the shade of the trees on the road side but we plant them so that men of a future generation may enjoy their shade. We take pleasure in all such work. We should widen this broad mindedness to a further degree and think of the good of the whole world and its future happiness.

According to the law of cause and effect with its extension over future births, if we live the Vedantic life, the growth of evils will be stopped, and the souls that will inhabit the future world will progressively rise to a higher stage. The object of right living is therefore twofold—one's own happiness and one's contribution to a better world irrespective of the disconnection in memory. The appeal of Vedanta is based on responsibility for the future world. Social and civic co operation permanently benefit the town or village wherein one is a citizen. Patriotism benefits the future generations of the country to which we belong. Vedanta seeks the welfare of the future world of which we are all the present

builders. If we live detached and dedicated lives, the world will be peopled by better men as time goes on. It is only the incorrigibly selfish that should ask for memory of personality in re-birth as a motive for right living.

TEXTS

TEXTS

All this world is pervaded by Me in form unmanifest; all beings abide in Me, but I stand apart from them.

मया ततमिदं सर्वं जगदव्यक्तमूर्तिना ।
मत्स्थानि सर्वभूतानि न चाहं तेष्ववस्थितः ॥

And yet beings are not rooted in Me. Behold the scheme of My sovereignty! Myself the origin and the support of beings, yet standing apart from them.

न च मत्स्थानि भूतानि पश्य मे योगमैश्वरम् ।
भूतभृन्न च भूतस्थो ममात्मा भूतभावनः ॥

Using Nature, which is Mine own, I create again and again all this multitude of beings, keeping them dependent on Nature.

प्रकृतिं स्वामवष्टभ्य विसृजामि पुनः पुनः ।
भूतस्राममिमं कृत्स्नमवशं प्रकृतेर्वशात् ॥

In the scheme of My sovereignty Nature brings forth the moving and the unmoving and keeps the world going.

मयाऽध्यक्षेण प्रकृतिः सूयते सचराचरम् ॥
हेतुनाऽनेन कौन्तेय जगद्विपरिवर्तते ॥

BHAGAVAD GITA CH. IX

- The Good is one thing, the Pleasant is another. These two lead to very different ends. The wise are not deceived by the attractions of the Pleasant. They choose the Good. Fools are snared into the mere Pleasant and perish.

अन्यच्छ्रेयोऽन्यदुतैव प्रेयस्ते
उभे नानार्थे पुरुषं सिनीतः ।
तयोः श्रेय आददानस्यसाधु
भवति हीयतेऽर्थाद्य उप्रेयो वृणीते ॥
श्रेयश्च प्रेयश्च मनुष्यमेतस्ती
सपरीत्य विविनक्ति धीरः ।
श्रेयो हि धीरोऽभिप्रेयसो वृणीते
प्रेयो मन्दो योगक्षेमाद् वृणीते ॥

KATHOPANISHAD

Self-realization is the way to liberation. Concentrating the mind on the Spirit within, man should realise the divine character of his own soul and its intrinsic freedom. The Supreme Spirit is lodged within oneself, unperceived because of the perplexities of joy and grief and attachment to worldly objects.

त दुर्दर्शं गूढमनुप्रविष्टं
गुहाहितं गहवरेष्टं पुराणम् ।
अध्यात्मयोगाधिगमेन देव
मत्वा धीरो हर्षं शोकी जहाति ॥

KATHOPANISHAD

This realization can come only if from inside one's own heart spring purity of resolve and earnestness of spirit. It does not come by much study or by learned discussions. It comes to one whose Self yearns for realization, and whose mind has turned away from evil and has learnt to subdue itself and is at peace with the world.

नायमात्मा प्रवचनेन लभ्यो
न मेधया न बहुना श्रुतेन ।

यमेवैष वृणुते तेन लभ्य-
स्तस्यैष आत्मा विवृणुते तनू स्वाम् ॥

KATHOPANISHAD

The openings of the mind, viz., the sense organs, are directed outwards. Therefore do men's thoughts ever tend outwards. But the few who have true understanding turn their mind inwards and realise the Self within. Those without understanding pursue external pleasures and fall into the widespread net of Birth and Death. Those of steady mind do not spend their thoughts on transient pleasures. They seek the joy of liberation

पराचि गानि व्यतूणत्स्वयम्.
तस्मात् पराङ् पश्यति नान्तरात्मन् ।
कश्चिद्धीरः प्रत्यगात्मानमैक्षत्
आवृत्तचक्षुरमृतत्वमिच्छन् ॥
पराचः कामाननुयन्ति बाह्यास्ते
मृत्योर्यन्ति विततस्य पाशम् ।
अथ धीरा अमृतत्वं विदित्वा
धूमध्वा वेप्सिह न प्रारयन्ते ॥

KATHOPANISHAD

The rain falling on the rocks divides itself and flows down the hill sides in many torrents. So does the ignorant man see manifoldness and is confused like the waters falling on the rocks. Water poured into water becomes one and the same with it. Thus it is with the Self of the man of understanding who sees unity in manifoldness.

यथोदकं दुर्गे वृष्टं पर्वतेषु विधावति ।
 एव धर्मान्पृथक् पश्यस्तानेवानुविधावति ॥
 यथोदकं शुद्धे शुद्धमामिक्तं तादृगेव भवति ।
 एव मुनेर्विजानत आत्मा भवति गौतम ॥

KATHOPANISHAD

The Soul is contained in the body as the fire is contained unmanifest in the wood. Fire takes shape in accordance with the thing burning. It is now the flame of a lamp, now a furnace, and now a forest-fire, according as to where it is manifested. The fire by itself is one and the same. So also is the Soul one, though manifold in embodiment. What is here is there and what is there is here, i.e., things and beings seem various but are, indeed, one Being.

We are liberated when we perceive this oneness. We go from death to death if we perceive difference. It is by enlightenment that the mind can overcome the perception of difference and have a vision of the transcendent oneness.

अग्निर्यथैको भुवनं प्रविष्टो
रूपं रूपं प्रतिरूपो बभूव ।
एवमस्तथा सर्वभूतान्तर्गता
रूपं रूपं प्रतिरूपो बहिश्च ॥

यदेवेह तदमुत्र यदमुत्र तदन्विह ।
मृत्योः स मृत्युमाप्नोति य इह नानेव पश्यति ॥
मनसैवेदमाप्तव्यं नेह नानास्ति विचन ।
मृत्योः स मृत्युं गच्छति य इह नानेव पश्यति ॥

KATHOPANISHAD

Everything in the universe abides in the Supreme Being. Realize this well, and realizing it cast off the thought of possessing what is enjoyed by another. Joy comes only by the giving up of desires and attachments. Go through the allotted years of your life, doing work in a detached spirit and dedicating everything to God. Thus

only can we escape the contamination of Karma

ईशावाग्यमिद सर्वं यत्किञ्च जगत्या जगत् ।
तेन त्यक्तेन भुञ्जीथा मा गृध वस्यस्विद्वनम् ॥
कुर्वन्नेवेह कर्माणि जिजीविषेच्छत समा ।
एव त्वयि नान्यथेतोऽस्ति न कर्म लिप्यते नरे ॥

ISAVASYOPANISHAD

He who thinks he knows really thereby proves himself ignorant. He who realizes that he does not know Him has best understood Him. Those who seek to understand Him, as they understand things of ordinary knowledge, can never achieve their object. Those who realize the limitation of the human mind in respect of the knowledge of the Supreme Spirit and therefore frankly confess ignorance, are really nearer to a true understanding of it.

यदिमन्यसे सुवेदेति दधमवापि
नून त्व वेत्थ ब्रह्मणो रूप ॥
यदस्य त्व यदस्य च देवेण्वय नु
मीमास्यमेव ते मन्ये प्रिदितम् ॥

यस्यामतं तस्य मत
 मतं यम्य न वेद सः ॥
 अविज्ञात विजानतां
 विज्ञातमविजानताम् ॥

KENOPANISHAD

Let man realize the divinity of his soul. Thereby does he obtain Release. The Lord upholds the universe which is built on a union of the manifest and the unmanifest, the imperishable and the perishable. Functioning as Enjoyer through the senses, the soul in man loses the consciousness of lordship and is enchained. When he realizes lordship, he is freed from every tie.

सयुक्तमेतत्क्षरमक्षर च •
 व्यक्ताव्यक्त भरते विश्वमीश ।
 अनीशश्चात्मा बध्यते भोक्तृभावा-
 ज्ञात्वा देव मुच्यते सर्वपाशैः ॥

SVETASVATAROPANISHAD

Iswara rules over the Soul as well as
 over material nature which forms the field

for the Soul's functioning By contemplation and repeated meditation, realization is attained of the unity of these three, God, Matter and Soul Man then reaches liberation from all the illusions of the world

क्षरं प्रधानममृताक्षर हर
क्षरात्मानावीक्षते देव एक ।
तस्याभिध्यानाद्योजनात्तत्त्वभावाद्
भूयश्चान्ते विश्वमायानिवृत्ति ॥

SVETASVATAROPANISHAD

The fire is not seen in its manifest shape when it is concealed in its birth-place, the wood But it appears to view when we bring it out So does meditation bring out the Supreme Spirit from within us wherein He has concealed Himself Like oil in the sesame seed, like ghee concealed in milk, like water concealed in the river-bed, like fire concealed in the fire-churner, is the Supreme Spirit within us, though not manifest When the two pieces of wood in the fire-churner are rubbed, the fire manifests itself The butter is separated from milk if we make it into curds and churn it The water is seen if we sink a pit in the sand of the river-bed The

Divine Self, that is hidden within oneself, will similarly be made manifest through Truth and meditation and control of mind and senses, which is penance. Let him make his body the lower piece and knowledge the upper piece of the Arani, and by the practice of meditation, churn the fire out, so to say

बह्नेर्यथा योनिगतस्य मूर्तिनं
 दृश्यते नैव च लिङ्गनाश ।
 स भूय एवेन्धनयोनिगृह्य-
 स्तद्धोभय वै प्रणवेन देहे ॥
 स्वदेहमरणि कृत्वा
 प्रणव चोत्तरारणिम् ।
 ध्यान निर्मथनाभ्यासात्
 देव पश्येन्निगूढवत् ॥
 तिलपु तैल दधनीव सर्पिराण
 स्रोतस्स्वरणीषु चाग्नि^१ ।
 एवमात्मनि गृह्यतेऽसौ
 मत्प्रेननं तपसा योज्युपश्यति ॥

This Isa, dwelling in the heart of man, can be perceived not by the eye but by the heart, and he attains immortality who thus perceives Him

न मदृशे तिष्ठति रूपमस्य
न चक्षुषा पश्यति कश्चनैनम् ।
हृदा हृदिस्थ मनसा य
एनमेव विदुरमृतास्ते भवन्ति ॥

SVETASVATAROPANISHAD

Not time or innate quality of matter is the true cause of phenomena, as some learned men imagine but the glory of God who dwells in and revolves all things, animate and inanimate The Universal Spirit is indivisible, untainted, tranquil Not discovering it in oneself, it is impossible to find an end for the misery of life It would be easier to roll up the sky and carry it on one's head like a tanner carrying his hide, than to achieve happiness without understanding and realizing the immanence of God

स्वभावमेको कवया वदन्ति

कालं तथान्ये परिमुह्यमाना

देवस्यैष महिमा तु लोके
येनेद भ्राम्यते ब्रह्मचरम् ॥

एको देव सर्वभूतेषु गूढ
सर्वव्यापी सर्वभूतान्तरात्मा ।

निष्कल निष्क्रिय शान्त
निरवद्य निरञ्जनम् ।

यदा चर्मवदाकाश
वेष्टयिष्यन्ति मानवा ।
तदा देवमधिजाय
दुःखस्यान्तो भविष्यति ॥

SVETASVATAROPANISHAD

The direct teaching of a father or a Guru is essential. Without this, book knowledge would be of not much avail. But more than all, it is important to remember that spiritual teaching can avail nothing without the previous purging of character necessary for the knowledge and realisation of the highest truth.

वेदान्ते परमं गुह्यं
पुराणेषु प्रचोदितम् ।

नाप्रशान्ताय दातव्य
नापुनायाशिष्याय वा पुन ॥

SVETASVATAROPANISHAD

The whole universe is a manifestation and product of that Universal, Formless, Causeless Being. The sun, moon and all the quarters, all knowledge, and the souls of all existing beings are parts and manifestations of that single all-immanent Being. All life and all qualities, functions and activities are forms of that single Energy. He is the Fire which makes the very Sun burn like a faggot in the fire. The rain does not rain, but it is He that rains through and by means of the clouds. Beings multiply, but it is He that multiplies through them.

अग्निर्मूर्धा चक्षुषी चन्द्रसूयो दिश श्रोत्रे
वाग्विवृताश्च वेदाः ॥ वायु प्राणो हृदय विश्वमस्य
पद्भ्या पृथिवी ह्येष सर्वभूतान्तरात्मा ॥
तस्मादग्निं तमिधो यस्य सूर्यं सोमात्पर्जन्य ओष-
धय पृथिव्याम् ॥ पुमान् रेत मिञ्चति योषिताया
वह्वी प्रजा- पुरपात्सप्रसूता ॥

MUNDAKOPANISHAD

The mountains and the seas, the rivers, the trees and plants and their life-bearing essences, all have issued from Him. Knowing that the Supreme Spirit dwells within your own heart, dear boy, cut off all the knots of ignorance that bind you here

अतः समुद्रा गिरयश्च सर्वेऽस्मात्स्यन्दन्ते
सिधवः सर्वम्पा ॥ अतश्च सर्वा ओषधयो
रसाश्च येनैष भूतैर्मितिष्ठते ह्यन्तरात्मा ॥
एतद्यो वेद निहित गुहाया सोऽविद्याग्रन्थि विकि-
रतीह सोम्य ॥

MUNDAKOPANISHAD

He is the whole Universe. Heaven, Earth and Sky, your mind and your life-breath are all woven into Him. Know that He is the one and only Existence. This knowledge is the bridge to immortality. All other learning is mere words to be escaped from.

यस्मिन्द्यौ पृथिवी चान्तरिक्षमोत मम सह
प्राणैश्च सर्वे ॥ तमेवैव जानय आत्मानमन्या
दाचो विमुचथामृतम्यैष सतु ॥

MUNDAKOPANISHAD

God is within your own heart. He has lodged Himself in your food-sustained body and rules it and its life, even He that sustains the whole universe and all its glory.

य सर्वज्ञ सर्वविद्यैस्यैष महिमा भुवि ॥ दिव्ये
ब्रह्मपुरे ह्येष व्योम्न्यात्मा सप्रतिष्ठित ॥ मनोमय प्राण-
शरीरनेता प्रतिष्ठितोऽग्रे हृदय सनिधाय ॥ तद्विज्ञानेन
परिपश्यन्ति धीरा आनन्दरूपममृत यद्विभाति ॥

MUNDAKOPANISHAD

When His presence in our own selves is realized, all doubts, all attachments and all activities vanish His presence should be realized in every aspect of existence

भिद्यते हृदयग्रन्थिश्छिद्यन्ते सर्वं मशया ॥
क्षीयन्ते चास्य कर्माणि तस्मिन्दृष्टे परावरे ॥

MUNDAKOPANISHAD

On realizing Him, what is individual life? What even is the sun and the moon, the stars and the lightning of the clouds?

All these are but reflections of that One Light. He fills all the quarters. He alone exists.

न तत्र सूर्यो भाति न चंद्रतारकं नेमा विद्युतो
भान्ति कुतोऽयमग्निः ॥ तमेव भान्तमनुभाति सर्वम्
तस्यभासा सर्वमिदं विभाति ॥ ब्रह्मैवेदममृतं
पुरस्ताद्ब्रह्म पश्चाद्ब्रह्म दक्षिणतश्चोत्तरेण ॥ अघ-
श्चोर्ध्वञ्च प्रसृतं ब्रह्मैवेदं विश्वमिदं वरिष्ठम् ॥

MUNDAKOPANISHAD

Mere learning does not reveal Him. One must realize that the Lord is the life that lives and the light that shines in everything. When he realizes this, he loses his dependence on externals and finds all bliss in himself.

प्राणो ह्येष यः सर्वभूतैर्विभाति विजानन्वि-
द्वान्भवते नातिवादी ॥ आत्मकीड आत्मरतिः क्रिया-
वानेष ब्रह्मविदा वरिष्ठः ॥

MUNDAKOPANISHAD

Truth, penance, true understanding and purity of life are essential requisites

for the revelation. When *Brahman* is revealed, He shines like a burning light within oneself.

सत्येन॑ ल॒भ्यस्तप॑सा ह्ये॒ष आ॒त्मा स॒म्यग्ज्ञा॑नेन
ब्रह्म॑चर्येण नित्यम् ॥ अत॑ शरी॒रे ज्योति॑र्मयो हि
शु॒भ्रो य प॑श्यन्ति यतयः क्षी॒णदो॑षाः ॥

MUNDAKOPANISHAD